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Residents asked to choose top MCREST volunteers

**by CHRIS GRAY
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The Macomb County Rotating Emergency Shelter Team (MCREST) is asking residents to help honor volunteers who donate their time and efforts to providing shelter to the needy.

From Oct. 18 to Nov. 18, residents are asked to go online and cast their votes to choose from amongst the hundreds of volunteers that have been nominated to receive the first-ever Good Samaritan Awards.

The top three vote-getters will be honored at MCREST's 3rd Annual Benefit Concert on Saturday, Dec. 4, which is the organization's biggest fundraiser of the year. The winners will be presented with a certificate of merit that recognizes their outstanding "mercy to their neighbors," while the other nominees will be recognized.

MCREST accepted two nominations from the 85 churches that rotate in providing needs to local men, women and children. Roughly 10,000 volunteers participate in helping MCREST, said Tim Joy, treasurer for the MCREST Board of Directors.

"For each week that a church runs the shelter, it takes close to 200 people to do it since it's such a large amount of responsibility," said Joy. "We have done a lot of various things to recognize volunteers in the past, but this is the first time we set up a special award for volunteers that go above and beyond."

Unfortunately, the volunteers have their hands full. Joy said the program had to turn away 45 children and their parents due to being at full capacity.

"There are new challenges this year, and what we want to get across is that the face of homelessness is changing," he said. "Because of the economy with layoffs and foreclosures, we're mostly serving single parents and kids."

More than 700 individuals receive assistance with meals, lodging, hygiene, transportation and possible employment assistance each year. Volunteers do everything from provide transportation to work to washing laundry.

In 2008, MCREST provided up to 60 shelter beds per night for 52 weeks, totaling over 19,000 shelter nights. Guests in the program are screened for alcohol use and must comply with drug tests to be admitted.

Local churches that participate include Grace Lutheran Fellowship, St. Clement of Rome Catholic, St. John Lutheran of Romeo, SS. John and Paul Catholic, St. John Lutheran (Ray Township) and St. Francis Catholic.

Founded in 1988, the non-profit organization receives funding through grants and donations, including the contribution of Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) funds from local communities.

For more information and to vote, visit www.mcrest.org.